

Re: Church World Service Vote Recommendation Opposing the Border Security and Enforcement Act of 2023

As a 77-year old humanitarian organization representing 37 Protestant communions, as well as refugee resettlement, home study and post release services, and asylum seeker case management offices and affiliates, Church World Service (CWS) urges the House Judiciary Committee to **VOTE NO** on the *Border Security and Enforcement Act of 2023* when it is marked up by the Committee on April 19. The bill – which combines several harmful and extremist anti-asylum, anti-immigrant, and anti-family proposals from previous Congresses – would eviscerate pathways to humanitarian protections in the United States.

Our nation's diverse faith traditions compel us to love our neighbor, accompany the vulnerable, and welcome the sojourner. We are called by our sacred texts to approach one another with love – not fear – and to affirm the value and dignity of all, including immigrants and asylum seekers. The *Border Security and Enforcement Act* contradicts these fundamental principles. It would create a less humane, less safe, and less effective border and all but eliminate key tools this country has used for decades, under both Democratic and Republican administrations, to protect those displaced by persecution and violence.

The bill includes several provisions that would dramatically restrict access to asylum, including by eliminating the chance to seek asylum except at a limited number of designated crossing points and by broadly allowing any administration *carte blanche* to pause or eliminate asylum protections as it sees fit. This bill would make it nearly impossible to pass the initial "Credible Fear Interviews" that allow asylum seekers to begin their asylum claims in the first place, violating *non-refoulement* by returning them to harm they fled. These sweeping provisions serve as an abdication of our moral and legal obligations to welcome those fleeing violence and persecution.

If enacted, the bill would also effectively end the use of humanitarian parole. Parole has a long and storied history facilitating the welcome of U.S. allies and others at risk from war torn countries. It was used for Vietnamese refugees after the fall of Saigon and Cubans fleeing oppression under Fidel Castro. Resettlement sites across the country currently serve Afghan allies evacuated via parole after the fall of Kabul and Ukrainians entering via the *Uniting for Ukraine* parole program. Parole is a vital executive tool that is also used for many other populations, including non-citizen veterans, international entrepreneurs, and it has been used to reunite separated families. All of these past and present parolee populations, many who have now built deep roots in our country and contribute immensely to our communities, would be rendered ineligible for protection under this bill.

Other provisions in the bill would result in family separation and harm unaccompanied children. The bill would undermine protections for children by striking key provisions of the *Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA)*, bipartisan legislation that recognizes the unique vulnerabilities faced by unaccompanied children and ensures they are properly screened for and protected from human trafficking. This would result in the immediate deportation of many additional unaccompanied children without employing existing processes to ensure they are not returned to violence or trafficking, an outcome the bill acknowledges. The bill also mandates a return to family detention, an immoral, cruel, and ineffective policy that in past iterations has caused significant psychological damage to children.

These represent only some of the many immoral and anti-immigrant provisions in the *Border Security and Enforcement Act*. Other provisions of this 137-page bill would wrongfully ramp up immigrant detentions and deportations, target undocumented populations and small businesses, and threaten access to subsidiary protections at the border like withholding of removal.

The anti-immigrant, anti-family provisions in this bill are not in keeping with our long legacy of welcome, etched into the base of the Statue of Liberty and rooted in our faith traditions and our conception of what it means to be an American. They also would do nothing to effectively manage the border. We urge the House Judiciary Committee to reject this bill and instead address the challenges we face at the border with compassion, treat all who arrive at our shores with dignity, and build on existing statutory protections to create more humane border processes.